

## Attitude toward Work Participation of the Urban Females: A Study in Dibrugarh District of Assam

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### Abstract:

*The workforce participation rate of the females in India and in the Indian state of Assam is lower than that of the males. Rural-urban divide in the work participation rate of the females is also remarkable. Examination of the factors affecting the willingness of females to participate in economic activity is required to comprehend the dynamics of labour supply. This cross-section data based paper investigates the factors that affect urban females' attitude toward participation in economic activities. Applying multinomial logistic regression, the study finds that the females having higher education are more likely to have favourable attitude, whilst married women and women in the later ages are less likely to have favourable attitude toward work participation. The study also finds that the women of the higher income families tend to have indifferent attitude. The paper concludes that policy framers must attempt at raising the level of female education along with creation of diverse employment avenues so*

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*as to bring the womenfolk into the labour market and to accomplish the pursued goal of promotion of gender equity and women empowerment.*

**Key words:** Urban female work participation, Favourable attitude, Unfavourable attitude, Indifferent attitude

## **Introduction**

Promotion of gender equity and empowerment of women is, inter alia, a key Millennium Development Goal taken by United Nations. Women's equality and empowerment can be established by bringing them more to the productive activity. Employment leads women towards their economic independence and hence, is considered as an indicator of their overall status in society (Mammen and Paxson, 2008).

Despite its significance for gender equity and sustainable growth, females in India have been facing unceasing unemployment. Unemployment has long been a social and economic problem in India and more so in the recent past. Few studies have documented a marked decline in the growth rate of employment in India in the post-reform period and this decline is relatively more marked in the case of female employment and that too in rural areas (Sundaram, K. 2001; Chadha & Sahu 2002). As per census 2011, female workforce participation rate in India (25.5 per cent) was lower than that of the males (53.3 per cent). Moreover, in comparison to the rural females, the workforce participation rate of the urban females is much less. As per 2011 census report, urban females' work participation rate in India was 15.4 per cent while that of the rural females was 30 per cent. With 22.5 per cent work participation rate of females in comparison to 53.6 per cent of the males, parallel is the state of affairs in Assam. Furthermore, as like the nation, the work participation rate of

the urban females in Assam (14.9 per cent) is lower than that of the rural females (23.7 per cent).

Constraints on women's work opportunities have been identified and discussed to great extent in a large number of studies. But very few attempts have been made to identify the correlates of willingness of the women to participate in economic activity. Factors determining the willingness of the women to participate in economic activity are extremely complex. Willingness may be affected by some individual factors like, age, education level, employability etc. and by some factors originating from economic, social and demographic circumstances that the women confront. Examination of the determinants of the willingness of females towards participation in economic activity may provide information that may help to comprehend the dynamics of labour supply. This paper attempts to identify factors affecting urban females' attitude toward participation in economic activities.

The study is done in Dibrugarh district which fall in the eastern part of the Indian state of Assam. The population census 2011 reports the total population of the District as 1326335 which accounts for 4.25 per cent of the state population. With a share of urban population in the total population (i.e. 18.4 per cent) higher than the state level (i.e. 14.1 per cent), the district is one of the urbanized districts of Assam. Agriculture is the primary occupation of the rural population of the District. Oil and Tea are the major industries of the District. But, the urban female workforce participation rate of the district is only 15.02 per cent which is much lower than their male counterpart (57.40 per cent).

## **Data and methodology**

The study is based on primary data collected through a sample survey. Samples have been drawn by following multi-stage sample technique. Firstly, out of the seven sub-Districts of the

District, Dibrugarh east, being the most urbanised, has been selected as the sample sub-District. In the second stage, the most urbanized town of the sample sub-District has been selected as the sample town. In the next stage 15% of the total wards of the sample town are taken as sample wards. The last stage of the sampling design is the selection of sample households. 5% of the total households of each sample ward have been selected at random as sample households. Total 263 sample households have been covered in the survey. One female of the age group 15-59 from each sample household is interviewed following a meticulously prepared interview schedule to collect the required information. Out of the surveyed 263 females, 133 females (i.e. 50.57 per cent) were found unemployed who have only been considered for identifying the determinants of attitude toward participation in economic activity.

The attitude of the females towards work can take various options: first, women may have favourable attitude to participate in work (willing to participate in work); second, unfavourable attitude to participate in work and thirdly, indifferent attitude towards participation in work. Therefore, the factors determining the willingness of the unemployed females to participate in work are identified using the multinomial logistic regression where the dependent variable attitude of females toward work participation is categorised into three mutually exclusive categories. The unfavourable attitude of females to participate in work is treated as the reference group. The multinomial logit regression model for determining the likelihood of choosing a particular attitude to work is as follows-

$$Y_i = \beta X_i + e_i$$

Where,

$Y_i$  is the dependent variable, named attitude toward work participation having three categories- unfavourable

attitude, favourable attitude and indifferent attitude toward work participation. These alternatives are categorized as 0, 1 and 2 respectively.

$X_i$  is the vector of independent variables,

$\beta$  represents coefficients of independent variables

$e_i$  is the error term.

The probability of choosing a particular category is given by

$$prob(Y_i = J|X_i) = \frac{e^{\beta_j X_i}}{1 + \sum_{k=1}^j e^{\beta_k X_i}}$$

J=0, 1, 2 ...j

### **Theoretical framework**

Willingness of the females to participate in economic activity may be affected by some individual and household level factors. The important individual factors are education level, age and marital status. Supporting the human capital theory it can be hypothesised that education has favourable impact on the attitude of the females toward work participation. The females who invest their energies in obtaining more education are likely to join the work force. Investment in education is positively correlated with earning potential for which educated people have a positive attitude towards work. Better educated people may consider unemployment as greater loss in earnings and human capital (Ahn, Rica and Ugidos, 1999). Consequently, it increases the opportunity cost of idleness. Highly educated females, who share modern, individualistic values, can be assumed to have higher income aspirations than the less-educated females. Moreover, they can be assumed to be more employable. Few studies (Aly and Quisi, 1996; Ahn, Rica and Ugidos, 1999; Sudarshan and Bhattacharya, 2009) observed greater female labour force participation with increasing level of education. Education of females is included in the regression

model as a categorical variable coding 0 for the females having education more than 10<sup>th</sup> standard and 1 for otherwise.

Age has been found to be negatively correlated with labour force participation (Aly and Quisi, 1996; Hafeez and Ahmad, 2002). Young women are more ambitious. They have modern, individualistic values and higher income aspirations. At young age females may have less familial responsibilities for which they may possess favourable attitude toward work participation. With increasing age they may turn to be dependants of others for which they may have either unfavourable attitude toward work participation or may remain indifferent.

Marital status may influence the attitude toward work participation. Married women may have unfavourable attitude towards participation in economic activity while the attitude of the single women may be favourable. Young singles are more ambitious and they have less familial burden. Therefore, they may desire to join the work force. On the contrary, married women may also have favourable attitude towards work participation. They may seek to enjoy financial autonomy and to have a good repute in the society by working outside the home. Studies (Aly and Quisi, 1996; Sudarshan and Bhattachary, 2009; Ackah, Ahiadeke and Fenny, 2009) have reported contrasting findings on the relationship between marital status and work participation. However, a dummy variable for marital status, coding 0 for married females and 1 for others, has been included in the model with the expectation that the married females will have unfavourable attitude to work.

The important household factors are household income and pressure of child rearing. The financial position or economic status of the family significantly influences the labour force participation of family members (Shah, 1986; Hafeez and Ahmad, 2002; Rangarajan, Kaul & Seema, 2011). The economic status of the family may have a negative impact on women

labour force participation decision. Females of poor income family are likely to have greater desire to participate in economic activity as they may be forced to seek employment to fulfill their family needs. Empirical finding (Sundaram & Tendulkar, 2004; Rangarajan, Kaul & Seema, 2011) that female participation rates are highly correlated to poverty gives support to this hypothesis. On the other hand, willingness to work participation may be unfavourable when the level of family income is high as the females of high income families are less pressed for work. As the level of living increases, women may prefer to not shoulder the additional burden of participation in economic activity (Mahendra Dev, 2004). Therefore, it is hypothesised that the less adequate is the household income, the more will be the likelihood of having favourable attitude toward work participation.

The number of child dependants may also influence labour market participation of the females. Presence of more child dependents raises the need for devoting more hours for child care, affecting the desire to work of the women adversely. The biologically dictated burden of childbearing and child rearing is their additional burden to the routine burden of running a household (Mahendra Dev, 2004). Few studies have found that the number of children negatively affects the labour force participation (Bloom and Freeman, 1986; Mahendra Dev, 2004). On the other hand, more number of child dependants means a greater need for income to support and hence women may consider participation in economic activity as inevitable. In urban areas, where nuclear families are predominant, mothers may have to take the responsibility of child-rearing. Further, the nature of urban employment may not make it possible to attend to children and to participate in work together (Reddy, 1979). If the 'pulling effect' of maternal role is weaker than the 'pushing effect' of earner's role, presence of more child dependants is likely to make the attitude of the females towards work participation favourable. It may also be possible

that women may want to have economic gains by participating in economic activity and may also want to assume household responsibility. Thus, affection for children with want for earnings may make their attitude toward work participation indifferent. In this study, number of children within seven years has been taken as a determinant of the attitude of the women toward work participation.

With this theoretical backdrop, the paper explores the determinants of the attitude of the urban females toward work participation.

## **Results and Discussion**

The female workforce participation rate of all the sample households (i.e. 263) is found to be 25.99 per cent. The corresponding figures of India and Assam being 15.4 and 14.9 per cent respectively, it can be stated that the rate of participation of the sample females in economic activity is higher than the national and state levels. Classification of the female workers into main and marginal worker categories shows that the female workforce participation rate in main worker category (20.5 per cent) is higher than that in marginal worker category (15.75 per cent). Majority of the female workers (68.28 per cent) are engaged in government services, trade, commerce, business, professions, banking, construction, entertainment artists, etc. and the least of them work as agricultural labourer (3.45 per cent).

Table - 1 depicts the descriptive statistics of the sample unemployed females (i.e. 133) in relation to the variables taken for investigation. Majority of them have expressed unfavourable attitude towards work participation while 27.07 per cent possess favourable attitude. Yet another 22.56 per cent women have expressed indifferent attitude toward participation in economic activity. The percentages of women expressing all the three attitudes being reasonably large, application of the



multinomial logit regression for determining the correlates of such attitudes is justified.

As shown in Table 1, the number of sample unemployed women having education beyond 10<sup>th</sup> standard is higher than the number of females with no education and education up to 10<sup>th</sup> standard or less. Close to 80 per cent of the females are married while the rest 20 per cent include the females having marital status other than married. Majority of the women (i.e. 63.16 per cent) do not have children. Thus, while majority of the women are married, bulk of them is childless. This may be because of late marriage and adoption of family planning by the urban females. The survey data show that half of the women are of the age group of 25-35. The mean age of females in our sample is 35 years.

**Table - 1**  
**Descriptive Statistics of the Sample Unemployed Women**

Characteristics	Number of sample women	Percentage
<b>Attitude toward work participation</b>		
Favourable	36	27.07
Unfavourable	67	50.37
Indifferent	30	22.56
<b>Education of the female</b>		
Education beyond 10 <sup>th</sup> standard	94	70.68
Otherwise	39	29.32
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	106	79.70
Otherwise	27	20.30
<b>Children under 7 years</b>		
No children	84	63.16
One children	34	25.56
2 and more children	15	11.28
<b>Age (in years)</b>		
15-25	23	17.29
25-35	67	50.38
35+	43	32.33
<b>Monthly Household Income (in Rs.1000/-)</b>		
Up to 20	27	20.30
20 to 30	24	18.04
30 to 40	33	24.81

40 to 50	25	18.80
50+	24	18.04

The sample women are almost evenly distributed over different income categories except the monthly household income range of Rs.30 to 40 thousands in which close to one-fourth of the samples fall. The mean household income of the sample women has been estimated to be Rs.38.71 thousand per month.

In the multinomial logistic regression model, the unfavourable attitude of females to participate in work is treated as the reference group and therefore, estimated model shows the favourable attitude of females relative to unfavourable attitude to participate in work and for indifferent attitude of females relative to unfavourable attitude toward work participation. While determining favourable attitude of females relative to their unfavourable attitude towards participation in economic activity, three factors namely, age, education and marital status of the females are found to have significant impact. With regard to indifferent attitude of females relative to their unfavourable attitude, only household monthly income is found to have significant impact.

**Table - 2**  
**Results of Regression Analysis**

Regressors	Favourable attitude			Indifferent attitude		
	B	Wald	Exp(β)	B	Wald	Exp(β)
Education	1.513*	4.717	4.538	0.098	0.037	1.103
Age	-0.170**	15.351	0.844	-0.017	0.500	0.983
Marital status	-2.093**	7.883	.123	-0.780	1.159	0.458
Household income	0.010	0.433	1.010	0.025*	4.472	1.026
Children under 7 years	0.573	2.779	1.774	0.242	0.685	0.1274
Constant	4.499	9.427	-	-0.907	0.621	-

Reference category: Unfavourable attitude

\*\*P<0.01, \*P<0.05

Chi-square = 215.97 (Not significant)

Cox and Snell= 0.360

Nagelkerke =0.412

The Pearson goodness-of-fit statistic (215.97) is found to be statistically insignificant which represents that the model adequately fits the data. Cox and Snell and Nagelkerke pseudo R-square statistics indicate that 36 per cent and 41 per cent variation respectively is explained by the model.

The results show that education of the females plays a vital role in determining their willingness to work. The exponential of the regression coefficient shows that, holding other factors constant, females having education more than 10<sup>th</sup> standard as compared to those having education less than 10<sup>th</sup> standard or no education at all are about 4.5 times more likely to have favourable attitude to participate in work than the unfavourable attitude. This is because economic inactivity causes greater loss in income and human capital to the better educated females. While analyzing for the employed females, it has been found that the mean monthly income of the employed females having education below 10<sup>th</sup> standard is Rs.5751 and that of the employed females with education above 10<sup>th</sup> standard is Rs. 20832. Whether the difference between the two means is statistically significant or not has been verified by applying T test. The result finds the difference statistically significant at 0.01 level and hence, it can be stated that higher education leads to greater earnings. The educated females who have put time, effort and energy in obtaining education are more likely to have modern-individualistic values and higher income aspirations. Considering their high earning potential and high opportunity cost of economic idleness, they might have expressed a favourable attitude towards participation in economic activity.

The age of the urban females appears as a significant determinant of the willingness to work at 0.01 level. The sign for the coefficient being negative, it can be stated that young females as compared to the females of the higher ages are more likely to possess favourable attitude to work participation relative to unfavourable attitude. The exponential of the

coefficient shows that holding other factors constant, for one year increase in age of the females, the odds in favour of having favourable attitude toward work participation in comparison to unfavourable attitude decreases by about 16 per cent. Increasing familial responsibilities might have made the attitude of females to participate in work in later years unfavourable. To verify the argument the mean number of children less than 7 years that the women of below and above 35 years possess has been estimated assuming the number of children below seven years of age as the proxy for familial load. It is found that the mean number of children for the women of below 35 years and above 35 years is .38 and .68 respectively. The T test confirms that the difference between the two means is statistically significant at .05 level which establishes that familial responsibilities increase with increasing age and thus, supports the argument. This also indicates an intense desire for employment opportunities amongst the younger generation. Young females are energetic who might have completed education afresh and hence, may like to put in their expertise by getting involved in some economic activity.

As expected, the marital status has been found to have significant impact on the willingness to work of the females. The odds ratio of the regression coefficient for marital status shows that, holding other factors constant, the odds of married women is about 88 per cent lower compared to the odds of other women to have favourable attitude towards work participation than unfavourable attitude. Married women are usually of higher age and often loaded by familial responsibilities. Contrastingly, the unmarried and other females are more likely to have favourable attitude towards work participation. High aspirations of the young ambitious singles supported by less familial responsibilities might have caused favourable attitude towards work participation among them.

Regarding indifferent attitude of females towards participating in workforce relative to their unfavourable

attitude, household monthly income is found to have significant positive impact. Thus, in contrast to our expectation the attitude to work participation of the females of the high income family has been found to be indifferent. The exponential of the coefficient indicates that, holding other factors constant, for one unit (Rs.1000/-) increase in household income, the odds of having indifferent attitude toward work participation in comparison to unfavourable attitude increases by 2.6 per cent. The reason for such indifferent attitude may be that the females of high income families are less pressed for work while at the same time they also stand ready to work for strengthening their socio-economic status. Therefore, females from well to do family, instead of making unfavourable attitude to participate in work, prefer to remain indifferent.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this micro level empirical study establish that the attitude toward work participation of the urban females is affected by some individual and household level factors. Applied multinomial logistic regression results show that education level of the women, their marital status and age and household income determine the attitude towards work participation significantly. It is found that females having education beyond 10<sup>th</sup> standard are more likely to have favourable attitude than those having education below 10<sup>th</sup> standard or no education at all. The high earning potential and high opportunity cost of economic inactivity might have made the attitude of the better educated females favourable. Given the other things, married women and women in the later ages are less likely to have favourable attitude toward work participation. High aspirations of the young ambitious singles supported by their less familial responsibilities may be the explanation of their favourable attitude towards work participation. Furthermore, females from wealthier family instead of possessing favourable or

unfavourable attitude toward work participation prefer to remain indifferent. Based on the findings of the study it can be concluded that policy framers must attempt at raising the level of female education so as to bring the women into the labour market. Moreover, more employment avenues should be created so that women can make the best use of their expertise at their most productive part of life. Then only, perhaps, the Millennium Development Goal of promotion of gender equity and empowerment of women will be accomplished.

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